

September 27, 2021

The Honorable Ron Wyden
Chairman
Senate Committee on Finance
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Finance Senate
219 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Crapo,

I write in favor of reauthorizing Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) by regular order. As of July 1, 2021, workers can no longer apply to receive the expanded eligibility and benefit provisions that Congress provided for in its last reauthorization of TAA. Failure to reauthorize TAA will jeopardize our commitment to American workers, and reauthorizing TAA in the manner currently proposed would be a rejection of the opportunity to achieve comprehensive trade reform to support those very same workers. My concern is not about the reauthorization of TAA, but rather what the reauthorization of TAA in reconciliation means for the broader trade agenda.

While the Senate unanimously passed a short-term extension of TAA this summer, the House of Representatives failed to take up the Senate extension, putting American workers in jeopardy. Apparently this was a calculated decision since House Democrats have included a seven year TAA reauthorization in their partisan reconciliation bill.

Despite TAA's necessity, deindustrialization is not the inevitable conclusion of some unalterable arc of economic progress. As policymakers, we can take steps to support American manufacturing and avoid the root causes for TAA. I believe that the best TAA is one that does not need to be used because workers remain employed at well-paying jobs.

In order to accomplish that aim, and support American workers and the domestic manufacturing industry, I believe that this TAA reauthorization should be considered alongside other trade reforms to foster American economic competitiveness and challenge anti-free market practices by foreign countries. I was glad to see some of these, such as reauthorization of the Miscellaneous Tariff Bill and the Generalized System of Preferences, included in your Trade Act of 2021 and was pleased to support including that legislation in the U.S. Innovation and Competition Act (USICA).

However, there are trade priorities beyond those included in the Trade Act of 2021, which the committee should continue to consider. One of these is legislation to strengthen our trade remedy capabilities, such as our anti-dumping and countervailing duty (ADCVD) laws. Given the widespread fears in Congress about China's anti-free market economic practices and the exportation of this model abroad through policies like the Belt and Road Initiative, I believe it to be absolutely critical to the national security and economic competitiveness of the United States to consider legislation which pushes back against China in this regard. Additionally, Congress should also consider the renewal of Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) to open markets abroad for Made in America exports, especially when it comes to agreements with United Kingdom and Japan, and on digital trade.

How can we fight for American jobs if we are only willing (and on a partisan basis no less) to reauthorize a program to assist those who are hurt by trade. To me it suggests an admission that the “losers” from trade, will always be just that. Such an admission is as unacceptable as it is false—good paying jobs do not appear and disappear at random; they do so as the result of intentional choices by policymakers.

This is why Congress should pass trade policies to expand the number of good paying jobs in the United States, and reduce the threats to those jobs from unfair competition abroad.

The best chance for that is to reauthorize TAA as part of a bipartisan trade reform package. I stand ready to work with Democrats and Republicans to make such a package a reality because I believe it is something we owe the American worker. I thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to working with you to build upon the Trade Act of 2021 by adding new provisions to strengthen our trade remedy laws, open overseas markets by providing trade negotiating authority, and to reauthorize Trade Adjustment Assistance this year.

Sincerely,

Rob Portman



Rob Portman
United States Senator